THE MINISTER OF INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN) : (a) to (c). The Standing Conference of Public Enterprises, a society registered under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, has made various suggestions including giving full autonomy and operational freedom of decision making to Chief Executives of Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). Taking various measures to improve the functioning of PSUs, including grant of greater autonomy, is a continuous process, and Government have been granting greater powers in respect of financial, personnel and operational matters to the managements of PSUs from time to time.

Impact on Production of Rubber and Coconut due to Import Policy

*339. SHRI N.K. PREMCHANDRAN : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the Government are aware that the liberalised import policy is likely to affect the rubber and coconut production adversely particularly in Kerala;

(b) whether the Government propose to review the decision of liberalised import policy;

(c) whether the Government also propose to exempt rubber products and coconut value added products from the purview of liberalised import policy; and

(d) if so, the details thereof and if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) At present nothing has come to the notice of Government that may give rise to such apprehension.

(b) to (d). There is no such proposal under consideration at present. However, review of the Export and Import Policy is a continuous process and changes in it are made from time to time as and when considered necessary in the public interest.

Support Prices of Spices

*340. SHRI RAMESH CHENNITHALA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether there has been a decline in the prices of most of the spices during the last three years;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is any proposal to fix support price for spices;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b). There has been a mixed trend in the movement of prices of spices during the last three years. A statement indicating movement of Wholesale Price Indeed (WPI) of spices and condiments is given below :

Annual Average Wholesale Price Index (WPI) of Spices (1981-82 = 100)

Commodity	1993	1994	1995	1996*
Black Papper	243.4	465.1	538.8	552.5
Dry Chillies	174.1	216.2	355.9	424.7
Turmeric	599.6	458.7	426.3	623.5
Ginger	371.1	500.3	741.5	615.9
Cardamom	1599.7	1007.2	789.1	838.8
Cummin Seed	707.9	393.2	399.3	550.3
Garlic	560.7	965.8	509.4	374.2
Spices & Condiments	474.5	419.4	442.9	501.5

* Ten months average (Jan-Oct., 1996) and provisional

(c) No, Sir.

(d) Does not arise.

(e) In order to ensure remunerative price to the growers of the spices the Government has brought spices under the Market Intervention Scheme. Under the Scheme, market operations are undertaken, when prices fall to uneconomic levels, on the specific request from the State Government for a Specific commodity, for a certain period and for a specific quantity at a fixed price. The Central nodal agency i.e., National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation and state designated agencies make purchases generally in equal proportion and also share losses, if any, in the same proportion.

Expenditure on Ministers

3115. SHRI B.L. SHARMA PREM : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether any ceilings has been fixed in respect of the expenditure incurred by the Ministers on telephone calls in their offices and residences as well as on fittings and furnishings of their offices and residences;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) if not, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the action taken in the cases where these ceilings are crossed?

THE MINISTER OF FINANCE (SHRI P. CHIDAMBARAM) : (a) to (c). Having regard to the functional and operational considerations, no limit has been prescribed on the number of telephone calls made from the office and residential telephones of Ministers.

In respect of furnishing of office and office portion of the residence of a Minister, a ceiling of Rs. 45,000/- has been prescribed. Further, in terms of the Ministers Residences' Rules, 1962, the value of furniture and electrical appliances provided free of rent at the residence of a Minister shall not exceed Rs. 38,500 in